

The Bonnie Situation¹

Bonnie Evelyn Armes, the youngest child of Donald and Marcella “Sally” Armes of St. Edward, NE, was born in San Pedro, CA while her father was working in a war time job in the Navy shipyard.² Her birth was announced by Don as “another damn girl!” Thus she joined her big sisters Mollie and Ruthie, and her brother Tommy; the latter as the only boy may well have been the family’s most beloved sibling.³ 74 years later, Mollie still recalled that August day in 1944:

I remember the day you were born. Ruthie and I were staying with Grandma and Grandpa Armes. Our grandparents already lived in Lomita, CA in the little house in the rear. Our family moved there later that year or early in 1945.

I think our Dad was living at home in the San Pedro duplex (561 West 39th St.) with Tommy who was cared for by Mother’s crazy cousin, Irene, from Nebraska. Irene was the youngest sister to Ruth Edwards and had learning/social challenges. She later married a Polish man named Aloysius Stanislaus Goodowski. I always loved the name. I don’t know what became of them. I asked Mother once about his first name as I thought Aloysius was an Irish name. There were a lot of Polish immigrants in Nebraska in the early 20th century.

The cousin, Irene, was a daughter of grandma’s sister Elizabeth called Aunt Lizzie. They had either 13 or 15 children, to include one set of twins. Irene was brought out to help when you were born. We lived in a duplex on Point Fermin in San Pedro during the war. The street (Pacific Ave) to get out there went thru part of Fort MacArthur. When they drove thru with Irene she leaned out the car window waving both arms and calling “Yoo Hoo soldiers!” Mother told us Irene was a little simple and lived at home with her parents. She was surprised later when they allowed her to marry.

Our Mom told funny stories of those not used to English; a neighbor telling her daughter: “Ellie Mae shut your shoe”. A school mate was named Yvonne. The mother had read the name but never heard it. The family called her “Wy-vone”, rhyming with “bone”. The neighbor’s husband asked advice from my grandfather as his daughter was very ill. The doctor said an operation would cost \$25, and he’d learned it would also cost about \$25 to bury her. I assume his quandary was that he might be stuck for both fees if the operation wasn’t successful.

I have no idea where Irene lived after marrying. Her older sister Ruth and husband Arnold Edwards were our only relatives from Mother’s family during the war except for her older brother Donald who brought his family in a trailer to find war work once or twice. They moved to Oakland in the later war years where he was killed falling from a high-rise construction site, hit by a girder falling from above him. Myrna and Kenny were the children from that marriage. You’ve met them at the Hirsch reunions.

¹ Title card from Pulp Fiction (1994), Bonnie’s least favorite modern movie.

² On 8 December 1943, the US Navy had seized control of Los Angeles SB&DDC (Los Angeles Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, founded in April 1917 for WW I work) under an executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

³ Donald Eugene “Don” Armes: FGM #71282252; Marcella Marie “Sally” Hirsch Armes: #71282253; Tommy: #295905

In my recollection, it was after our dinner when Dad came in to tell the grandparents and Margie about your birth. "Another darned old girl!"....probably didn't say darned. But he did seem happy and excited that evening. I was too young, almost 9, to know whether to take offense for the new baby girl, or on behalf us two "big sisters". But the adults were all happy and relieved everything had gone well. In later years I heard Mother's account of how the birth was by appointment on a Sunday, induced for the doctor's convenience during WWII as there was a shortage of doctors....so many in the military.

Ruthie and I were pleased to have a baby sister, and were wild to see the baby. Dad did take us to the hospital to stand outside Mother's window and wave, but we couldn't go in. We had to wait several days before they brought you home, and we could hold baby "Bonnie".... carefully supervised.

Ruthie and I had a terrible time sleeping together in a twin bed at Grandma's. We got scolded for fighting about, "she's touching me."..."she's on my side", etc. When I first was married, and went thru a little of that again getting used to another in the bed, I recalled Ruthie and I fighting.

You were a great favorite with Grandma and Grandpa Armes. I think it was the first they enjoyed being grandparents.

Anyway, this is a kid's memory of the day.

You can't go home again: When Bonnie was about three years old, Sally and Don grew homesick for their old life in Nebraska, where they were both born and raised, and where they met and married. Don's uncle provided a dairy farm that they could lease in St Edward and the couple loaded up the family and took off. I once asked Sally how long it took to realize that you can't go home again. "About two weeks," she replied. The family stayed two years, despite finding that life had changed, cliques had replaced close relationships, and farm life in Nebraska was damn hard. Each Sunday evening Don wrote a weekly letter back to his parents in California, and in 2002, Mollie and Ruthie compiled and published a subset of this collection. These humorous anecdotes of life on the dairy farm with 'the kids' (Tommy and Bonnie) and 'the girls' (Mollie and Ruthie) make for most entertaining reading. In 1948, the family moved back to Lomita, CA, never to move again. Bonnie says that when you read those letters, you will understand why.

Shmoos: Years later, when Bonnie was about 15 or 16, she was reminiscing with her mother about those Nebraska days, and mentioned the herd of shmoos they raised on the farm. Sally looked at her with more than a bit of disbelief. "Bonnie, you do know that shmoos are not real...don't you?" "What? No, I can picture we had that long road



going to the dairy barn – and there were cows out in the field on the left – and the shmoos were in the field on the right.” “Bonnie, honey that was a corn field!” For family entertainment, Don had formed and painted plaster of Paris molds of various animals – and shmoos, the cute little creatures introduced on 31 Aug 1948 by Al Capp in his *L’il Abner* strip which were so accommodating as a food source. Apparently they made an impression on Bonnie.

Sibling squabbles: The “little kids”, Tommy and Bonnie, were always squabbling, and since Tommy was the older one, he was smart enough to strike first and then yell when Bonnie retaliated. Sally had the theory that most kids misbehavior must be attributed to constipation; thus the standard treatment for fighting and carrying on was either Castor Oil or Milk of Magnesia. Once after an alternation, Sally was out of ‘the cure’ and sent Tommy to St Edward to buy some Milk of Magnesia. Tommy apparently had a pang of conscience, because upon his return, he sidled up to Bonnie and whispered, “I got you the mint flavor!”

The kids always traveled in the back seat of the car with the expected interactions. They were told to stay on their own side of the seat, but Tommy figured out how to overcome the invisible barrier. Bonnie complained at once: “Mom! Tommy’s breathing on me!” Without missing a beat, Sally intoned, “Tommy! Stop breathing!”



Bonnie (2½) and Tommy (4), c. 1947

Drive-in: The popularity of the drive-in movie spiked after World War II and reached its heyday in the late 1950s. When Bonnie was about 10 years old, and Don was off at a Boy Scout weekend with Tommy, Sally and Bonnie decided to try out one of these new outdoor theatres. Sally fried up some chicken and made some mashed potatoes and baked a chocolate cake. They filled up a big picnic basket and left early in order to get a good spot. Once parked, Bonnie headed down to the playground, had a great time and then headed back to the car where she and her Mom dove into the great dinner. After that, they got tired and fell asleep. They awoke to horns honking as it was dark and people were leaving the drive-in; they had slept through the entire feature and all the coming attractions! They never did see the movie.

The Poem: Bonnie liked math, and diagramming sentences in English, for the reason that it was not dependent on the teacher; when you have it correct, it’s correct, regardless. One night, Sally came into Bonnie’s bedroom and found her crying under the covers with a flashlight. “Whatever is the matter?” asked Sally. Bonnie sobbed, “We’re supposed to write a poem with personification – giving human features to an inanimate object. I’m trying to write “Roses are red” and give them lips, but I can’t make it work!” she sobbed. “Oh, for crying out loud, give me the paper”, said Sally. About ten minutes later, she came back with:

The Steam Engine

*Belching smoke with a mighty roar
His huge jaws open wide
His fiery tongue laps out with greed
As another bite disappears inside*

*Men stand in awe as the huge beast
Devours his daily fare
You can't appease his appetite
His gluttony is beyond compare!*

Well, Bonnie's teacher loved it. She made Bonnie read it to the class. Then they made Bonnie go around and read it to all the English classes. *Then* they moved her up into Advanced English – that was the worst, as it meant more work for Bonnie.

Sassy: When Bonnie was about 16, Sally underwent some dental surgery and was laid up for awhile. Bonnie was visiting with her, and made the mistake of 'sassing her mother.' Sally said, "Bend over so I can slap your face." Bonnie dutifully leaned over the bed, and Sally weakly reached up and barely touched her cheek. They both burst out laughing.



The Denial: Bonnie attended Bishop Montgomery High School in Torrance, CA. The school had no cafeteria, so the students would bring their own lunch and often Bonnie would sit out in the grass with her friends under a tree. One day, a truck pulled up, a sight to behold. One of the girls said, "Bonnie, isn't that your father?" "Ah ... no, I don't think so," stammered an embarrassed Bonnie. At the time, Don Armes was the manager of Lomita Lath & Plaster, and had indeed come bouncing across the school terrain, sporting bright red suspenders, a denim shirt with

macramé birds emblazoned on the collar, in his brightly painted yellow and red company truck with a load of gerbils in the back and a dog hanging out the window. About that time he spots the girls, and turns with a big wave: "HI, BONNIE!"

Long Beach State: As the first and only child of the Armes family to attend college, you would have thought Bonnie would take it seriously. Not so much. She developed two close friends, Celina and Sue, and one weekend, by means still unclear, Sue was able to obtain about six white rats from a biology professor. The girls kept them in the bathtub for awhile, until Bonnie remembered that some of the boys were having their Friday night poker party. The girls transferred the rats into a metal trash can, and took off for the apartment. They could hear the poker game underway, and Bonnie signaled to Sue to start dropping rats through the slightly open louvered windows. About the third one clung on to the drapes with its little claws, and Sue had a heck of a time getting it to drop. She turned and whispered, "I'm not doing this anymore – Bonnie, you do it!" "Oh, Sue," exclaimed Bonnie, "Don't be such a wuss!" Poor Sue had to continue to deposit all six of the rats – Bonnie never touched them. About that time, a scream was heard from one of the boys, and the girls took off running.

The next morning at the Student Union, they were in having coffee when the boys came in. "You'll never believe what happened last night at our poker party!" "What?" asked the girls, innocently. The boys went through their exciting story, and ended with, "And our landlord is hopping mad!" That was something the girls had never thought about, and thus they never did confess their prank.

How Bonnie Met George: Those same boys were friends of the girls, and one Saturday evening when things were slow, they suggested, "Hey, let's go down to the Pike!" The Pike was an amusement zone in

Long Beach, founded in 1902 along the shoreline south of Ocean Boulevard with several arcades, food stands, gift shops, a variety of rides and a grand bath house. It was a favorite liberty hangout for sailors in the area, and noting this, the guys came up with an idea: “OK, you girls parade up and down on the beach, and we’ll pretend you’re for sale!” So the girls pranced back and forth, as the boys called out, “Step right up! Lovely girls just for you! Turn around, girls!” Some of the young sailors were fascinated, and one came up to Bonnie: “Say, is this for real?” As it turned out, he followed them home, and the girls were in trouble. The next night, a Navy Lieutenant showed up to find out who had been harassing his sailors – and as luck would have it, that handsome lieutenant was George Nolan. In later years when folks asked George how he met Bonnie, he would reply off-handedly, “Oh, she was for sale down at the Pike in Long Beach.” The Pike closed not long thereafter.

9/11: If you survived Y2K, you have a story of where you were on 9/11: that September morn in 2001 when the news came across the air waves that “A plane has hit one of the Twin Towers in Manhattan.” Bonnie’s story is a bit more immediate: she, her daughters Beth and Marcey and granddaughters Mollie and Maggie were all in Boston, Mass – the city from which two of the four aircraft used as weapons of mass destruction were hijacked that Tuesday in 2001.

The three generations of Armes girls were there for a special eye operation for 4-year old Mollie Baland, who was born with *aniridia*, a condition in which the iris of the eye is non-existent. With this condition, a patient is more likely to get macular degeneration and cataracts, and this operation was to improve her vision, as the condition cannot be completely resolved, even with an eye transplant. When they got in the cab, Marcey and her 13-month old daughter Maggie joined them, having driven out from Lewisburg, PA – or from Princeton? Beth and Mollie and Marcey rode in the back of the cab, and Bonnie rode up front in the passenger seat – and then the word came across the radio that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center.

They assumed it was a small plane, and the taxi ride continued to MassGeneral (University of Massachusetts General Hospital). Upon arrival, young Mollie was checked in and prepped for the surgery. Then the word came through about the attack. Immediately, the Hospital went on full emergency alert, canceling all operations and preparing for what they thought would be a massive influx of emergency patients. The nurse came in and said all surgeries were cancelled; a bit later she came back and informed the group that the doctor said, “Well, this little girl is prepped, ready to go, this is a 45 minute operation and I’m going to go ahead with it.” – which he did. Of course, due to the brutal method of attack, there were no ‘injured’ patients to be medevaced from New York, or the Pentagon, or Pennsylvania, to Boston.

Following the operation, while Mollie was recovering in her room, the little family group watched the continuous television news coverage of the horrific and courageous events of the day. When released later that day, they put Mollie in her stroller and walked back to their hotel where they had to prove they were registered guests, and again were required to show ID to get on the elevator. Little Mollie, with her one eye bandaged, only wanted some ice cream. There was a Ben & Jerry’s on the ground floor, but all the stores, all the restaurants were closed down. Finally, Bonnie went to the hotel restaurant, and found the maître d’ up front. “My granddaughter has just undergone an eye operation, and all she wants is some vanilla ice cream. Can you help us?” The maître d’ disappeared into the kitchen, returned with a big bowl of vanilla ice cream – and would not accept any money for it.

They had to stay another day. The planes hit on Tuesday, and they had to go back (on Wednesday or Thursday) for a follow-up look by the surgeon. The next morning, the trio were ready to head home to

Albuquerque – but how? Logan Airport was closed in Boston, as were most of the airports on the East Coast. All rental agencies were emptied of vehicles. Bonnie phoned back to daughter Katy in Albuquerque, and Katy's husband Tony was able to use some of his American Express travel connections to locate a rental agency in nearby Cambridge, Mass that may have a vehicle available.

Marcey drove the three to Cambridge. As they pulled into the rental agency, a couple was just bringing a car in for return. Without a pause, the couple got out, and the three new renters jumped in, and away they went. Marcey waved a quick good-by and returned with little Maggie to Lewisburg.

Driving to Albuquerque was an almost continuous operation: Beth would drive for awhile, then Bonnie. They would stop for gasoline, and to grab some food. They went into a K-Mart and got Mollie some crayons and something to play with during the trip, and the two adults drove on. When they went through St. Louis, they saw the arch, and kept driving. It took them 2½ days to return to Albuquerque.

Mass in Paris: Bonnie Situation stories could become a book of their own, but here is the wrap-up story. Bonnie is at her best when telling a story on herself. This event occurred in May 2019 when a dozen Hirsch family members made the Heritage Tour of Ireland and the Isle of Jersey; after which all went off in various directions. Tom Genoni and Mike had long promised Sheila and Bonnie a trip to Paris, and this was to be the time. After several glorious days of touring, as we were returned to our Hôtel Les Dames du Panthéon, our Uber driver told us: "Oh, you should really see the church right behind the Pantheon! It is glorious!" So the next day, a Saturday, we traipsed over to Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, located on the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève in the 5th arrondissement, near the Panthéon.

It is truly quite a beautiful church which contains the shrine of St. Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris. The church is Roman Catholic and also contains the tombs of Jean Racine and Blaise Pascal. Yes, *that* Blaise Pascal! A prodigy mathematician who constructed a mechanical calculator before the age of 19 and known for philosophical arguments to include Pascal's Wager.

Well, there we were on a Saturday and as we walk in, we see that there is a Mass going on. The aisle was filling between two columns of connected wooded chairs. At this point in the Mass, the small congregation was lining up to take the sacraments. Bonnie being a good Catholic (the only such in our group) got in line. She noticed as she proceeded that several of the seated congregation were staring at her, like "what is she doing here?" Bonnie was a bit miffed, thinking – "These snooty Parisians! I'm a good Catholic, I can take the sacraments." Well, the line slowly moved on, and as she finally approached the altar, the line opens to display a *casket*. She had crashed someone's funeral.

Bonnie being Bonnie had to think fast: Do I throw myself across the casket, weeping uncontrollably as if the long-lost mysterious mistress? No, thankfully she completed the sacraments and returned to our little group, quite subdued. However, since she had already humiliated herself, she *did* suggest that we might as well attend the reception ...

